

4 Ex Combatants as Deliberative Subjects

4.1 Introduction

Why would Colombian ex combatants constitute an appropriate choice as study subjects in the search for answers to the main research questions posed in previous chapters? As explained before, this paper aims to explore the possibilities of deliberation under adverse contextual conditions, particularly democratic constraints and open conflict. Although Colombia, as a country, suffers both conditions, not every ordinary Colombian citizen experiences them in their quotidian life. From this perspective, a proper research design should ensure the participation not of any type of research subjects, but of one who may reasonably represent those citizens affected by the unfavorable conditions in mention. As it will be argued along this chapter, it is under this logic that ex combatants turn out to be a proper choice.

The previous chapter describes how democracy's weaknesses and conflict are intertwined problems. Ex combatants' life trajectories, just as those of some peasantry sectors, exemplify the effects of institutional failure to control and deliver basic goods and services to populations in remote corners the country. State's incapability to act as sole sovereign force, and legitimate provider of public goods, has forced a sizable proportion of Colombians to live under the rule of local militias, and to keep a limited understanding of what true citizenship means. Under these conditions, joining an insurgent, or counter-insurgent illegal organization becomes a natural, or even a forcible option for many, particularly for the rural youth, rendering democracy a distant and abstract formulation.

A good number of texts describe at length the processes and conditions that pushed socially and politically deprived peasants to opt for the armed option (Jaramillo et al., 1986; Palacios and Safford, 2001; Corredor, 1992). What still remain greatly under-researched are the effects of Colombian protracted war on post-conflict democratic attitudes and practices, especially among those who directly experienced hardships from confrontation in the battlefield.¹ Precisely, this constitutes the specific background context for ex combatants who may later potentially engage into deliberative talks.

¹ Further studies on this topic will benefit from empirical psychological research on post-war traumas conducted among demobilized civil war veterans. An approximation can be found in Maynard (1997), Kingma (1999), and Nilsson (2005).

Although existing data cannot provide us with a proper depiction of how contexts of war and democratic deficit affects ex combatants' deliberative behavior, we can at least try to describe the characteristics that make them a distinctive population within Colombian society. In particular, there are three differentiating issues: their dependency relation to the Colombian State, their demographic patterns, and their group identity.

Correspondingly with these three main traits, the next section of this chapter will discuss the main challenges faced by ex combatants in their process of leaving war behind, and inserting into civility. A third section will provide a quantitative description ex combatants in Colombia, with an emphasis on their main demographic characteristics. And the final section will build upon twenty-eight-and-plus hours of recorded discussions among ex combatants, collected for the purposes of this research, in order to qualitatively picture the social discourse that renders them a distinctive social group.

4.2 From armed groups to democracy: The challenge of reintegration

Most ex combatants depend on the Colombian State's reintegration assistance to have minimal living conditions once they leave their armed groups. The term "reintegration" refers to the process of transition undertaken by ex-combatants from a military to a civilian life in community (Lamb, 2008; Özerdem, Alpasland and Podder, 2008). How long reintegration takes is uncertain, although there is a consensus that it is necessarily a lengthy process that can span many years, close to a decade, or even beyond (Nilsson, 2005).

An ideal reintegration program should address three basic dimensions:

- *Economic reintegration and employment*: Refers specifically to the development of livelihood means for demobilized people and their families, and more generally to the inclusion of ex-combatants into productive dynamics, especially in local-scale markets (Buxton, 2008; Specht, 2003; United Nations, 2009). Former fighters' serious deficiencies in terms of work skills often put them in disadvantage when compared to ordinary citizens. Such situation is aggravated by the fact that both ex combatants and no-combatants are usually forced to compete for income generation and employment in post-conflict economies already distorted by the destruction of infrastructure, social capital, and the emergence of illegal markets (Del Castillo, 2009).
- *Political reintegration*: Process whereby ex-combatants develop skills to participate in the political system as individuals, or as members of political organizations. Despite the existing documentation of experiences around the world, only recently progress has been made to conceptualize the political reintegration, though referred mainly to the transformation of rebel groups into political parties (Jarstad and Sisk, 2008; Soderberg-Kovacs, 2007). So far, political reintegration has been essentially

understood as opportunities for participation in collegiate bodies, councils and governing boards, committees, etc. (Lephophoto, 2007), while aspects such as civic qualification and informal political participation remain largely unspecified.

- *Social and psychological reintegration*: Process by which ex combatants make an effort to become part of a community, and the community itself actually accepts them as such. The social and psychological reintegration challenge involves not only community work with both sides, but also psychosocial intervention at the individual level (USAID, 2006; Kingma, 1998). To achieve social reintegration, both ex combatants and communities may be subjected to aid for trauma healing and reconciliation. Also, the ex fighters may be targeted by specialized educational programs aimed to change their war-related habits and attitudes.

Meeting these three essential aspects of reintegration means not only to develop an ambitious agenda, but also to take on structural problems commonly found in post-conflict societies, such as unemployment and insecurity. Unfortunately, there is not a theoretical answer to what the endpoint for these efforts should ideally be, making it more difficult for policy-makers around the world to assess progress. Although reintegration's three main dimensions have been identified, key questions such as what a good reintegration process is, how it might be measured, and what factors are more or less crucial, still remain open.

4.2.1 The institutional offer in Colombia

Although there are not straightforward answers to the questions mentioned above, the academic literature on reintegration draws from field experiences and case studies to note the importance of long-term care in six key areas: land ownership, business plans, basic work skills, employment, legal stability, and reconciliation. Additionally, there is a consensus on the need to provide financial assistance, or humanitarian aid, to former fighters, as they are considered in the short term a vulnerable and disadvantaged population, particularly in their effort to join a post-war economy. This aid comes usually as cash, bonds, clothing, food kits, and subsidies, and is aimed to facilitate ex combatants' transition from their previous life in the armed group to a civilian economic system, as least for the first months after demobilization (Özerdem, Alpasland and Podder, 2008; Lamb, 2008; United Nations, 2006; SIDDR 2006).

Many lessons learned from twentieth-century reintegration processes in Colombia have been already documented in the hope of shedding light into contemporary challenges (Instituto Luis Carlos Galán, 2000; Villarraga, 2006). At least three historical experiences emerge as cornerstone antecedents: the amnesty and demobilization of guerrilla squadrons after the end of the 1948-1958 civil war; the negotiated peace accords between guerrilla groups and the Colombian government in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which led to a large number of disarmament and demobilizations, counted in the few thousands; and the recent demobilization of paramilitary squadrons and guerrilla deserters since the early 2000s, the largest in history so far. Each of these cases contributed to an emerging body of knowledge

on reintegration's promises and pitfalls, useful not only for the Colombian case, but also for similar processes in post-conflict societies around the world.

The current disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program in Colombia, administered by the Colombian Agency for Reintegration, formerly known as Office of the High Commissioner for Reintegration (both ACR in Spanish), offers participants the following services:

- Grants and quotas for basic primary, secondary, and superior education –e.g. university, technical, technological.
- Bi-monthly psychosocial sessions and home visits.
- Family and community activities.
- Advice and information on access to health services.
- Job search assistance, and job quotas within public and private companies.
- Advisory and access to business plans seed capital.
- Monthly financial stipend in cash, ranging between US\$80 and US\$280 (below minimum wage).
- Legal advisory.
- Security services (ACR, 2008, 2009, 2010b).

Additionally, Mayor's Offices in Bogotá and Medellín provide additional services, in coordination with the ACR. In Bogotá, ex combatants access to the following complementary assistance:

- Job quotas as community guides in the public transportation system and other public facilities.
- Open-air cultural and recreational activities.
- Formal training in environmental issues, protection of civil rights, and domestic violence prevention.
- Quotas in children daycare facilities.
- Additional health services (PAPDRG, 2009).

Now, who are the Colombian ex combatants currently in process of reintegration? Although information on participants since 2003 has been scarce and poorly managed,² ACR has been building up a more reliable database since 2008. Some of the available data are discussed in the following section.

4.3 The Colombian ex combatants: A quantitative picture

Back in 2008, the ACR was struggling to deurate and update official figures previously gathered by the Ministry of Interior, between 2002 and 2006, on thousands of demobilized

² Lack of accurate information has been a recurrent problem in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs all over the world.

guerrillas and paramilitaries in process of reintegration to civil life.³ Existing data, which informs this research, still lacks of proper consistency, but serves at least to provide a general picture of our target population.

This section compiles mainly official figures either published by the ACR, or made available by it for the purposes of this research. In absence of more detailed information on more relevant aspects, following paragraphs will concentrate in six major areas: ex combatants' numbers, former armed group affiliation, gender, education level, age, and geographical location. The first tables shown below will refer to the general demobilized population in the country, while the last ones describe those living in the capital city, Bogotá. As it will be explained below, it is this latter population what better fits our research purposes.

4.3.1 Ex combatants in Colombia

The first question to be addressed here is: how many ex combatants are there in Colombia? Figures have changed over time as the ACR continues depurating its database, so it comes as no surprise to find slightly differing numbers in different official publications. Here we choose to privilege figures retrieved directly from the ACR database upon request from our research. Figures on the row labeled as “total certified demobilizations”, included on table 4.1 below, are based on one of the latest ACR publications, dated on December 2010. This row describes the total number persons officially recognized as demobilized from illegal armed groups. The row below indicates the number of those former combatants who, after demobilizing, actually joined the ACR reintegration program, between 2007 and 2010. Given the fact that ACR was created in late 2006, figures for this row are only available from 2007. As criteria to count participants in or out of the program have also varied in time, contradictory numbers can be easily found in related publications.

Table 4.1: Number of demobilized ex combatants in Colombia, 2003-2010

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<i>Total certified demobilizations</i>	3,506	8,869	21,791	42,104	45,041	48,041	50,721	52,617
<i>Participants enrolled in the ACR reintegration program</i> [†]	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	31,196	31,585	31,286 ^{††}	32,607 ^{†††}

^{††} As of May 2009.

^{†††} Contradictory as it is, figures previously reported by ACR to the Colombian Parliament put numbers above 34,000 for the period 2008-2010 (ACR, 2009, 2010b).

Sources: ACR (2008c, 2010a, 2009), ACR database.

³ A total of 31,671 paramilitaries were disarmed and demobilized between 2003 and 2006 as a result of the negotiation between the Colombian Government and leaders from the paramilitary confederation known as AUC (Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz, 2006). Additionally, other paramilitaries and deserting guerrillas have been allured since 2002 by the Government to give up their arms, in exchange of legal and economic benefits.

Former right-wing fighters constitute the majority of ex combatants in Colombia, as negotiations between the Government and paramilitary leaders led to the complete demobilization of the AUC.⁴ Demobilized ex guerrillas from FARC, ELN, ERP, ERG, and EPL, in turn, are individual deserters from existing armed structures whose aggregated numbers, nevertheless, are sizable and still growing.⁵ Table 4.2 shows how proportions of ex combatants from each side varied between 2007 and 2010.

Table 4.2: Proportion of demobilized ex combatants in Colombia by armed group, 2007-2010

	2007	2008	2009	2010 [†]
<i>AUC</i>	76%	75%	66%	63%
<i>FARC</i>	18%	20%	26%	29%
<i>ELN</i>	5%	4%	7%	7%
<i>ERP, ERG, EPL</i>	1%	1%	1%	1%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%

[†] As of March 2010.

Sources: *ACR (2009, 2010b)*, *FIP (2010)*, *ACR database*.

In terms of gender, an overwhelming majority of ex combatants are males, as table 4.3 shows. Although it is commonly understood that guerrilla groups tended to have larger proportions of women among their ranks, no reliable data on this issue was available at the time of this study.

Table 4.3: Demobilized ex combatants in Colombia by gender, 2007-2010

	2007 [†]	2008 ^{††}	2009	2010 ^{†††}
<i>Female</i>	9%	16%	13%	14%
<i>Male</i>	91%	84%	87%	86%

[†] As of September 2007.

^{††} As of March 2008.

^{†††} As of May 2010.

Sources: *ACR (2007, 2008b, 2010a, 2009)*, *ACR database*.

In general terms, Colombian ex combatants constitute a population with a relatively low level of formal education, when compared to ordinary citizens. Many of them joined the armed groups after completing a few years of school, or even none. Since 2006, the ACR found problematic to rank ex combatants according to old educational records, and opted to classify their current basic academic skills. Changes in the way former fighters are classified have led us to count on hardly comparable data across years. Table 4.4 compiles estimations

⁴ It is a matter of discussion in Colombia whether all AUC fighters actually disarmed and demobilized, although the organization was formally dismantled in 2006.

⁵ ERP and ERG formally disappeared as organizations after their last fighters demobilized in 2005 and 2008 respectively. EPL troops, in turn, were counted only in the tens in the late 2000s, according to Colombian military authorities.

contained in different publications since 2007. Significantly, there is no reliable count on the proportion of illiterates.⁶ In 2008, table 4.4 shows, only about half of ex combatants who were accessing ACR educational services had finished primary school. That proportion grew to more than two thirds in coming years.

Table 4.4: Proportion of demobilized ex combatants in Colombia by education level, 2007-2010[†]

	2007	2008	2009	2010
<i>Primary (0-5 years)</i>	46% ^{††}	49% ^{†††}	36%	27%
<i>Secondary (6-11 years)</i>	N/D	48%	60%	69%
<i>Superior</i>	N/D	3%	4%	4%

[†] Figures from 2008-2010 were calculated on the basis of ex combatants who accessed to educational services provided by the ACR reintegration program.

^{††} Includes at least 4% of illiterates. As of September 2007.

^{†††} Includes at least 5% of illiterates.

Sources: ACR (2007, 2008c, 2009, 2010b).

By the time of this writing, the ACR lacked of comparable and/or reliable figures on participants' age ranks. By 2010, distribution figures were estimated to be 19 percent of young people between 18-25 years old, 72 percent of young adults between 25-50 years old, and 4 percent of people older than 50 years old (ACR, 2010a).

Lastly, we are also in position to examine ex combatants' geographical zone of residency. Between May 2008, starting point of our research, and December 2010, most demobilized former fighters in process of reintegration had their permanent residence in the Atlantic and Middle-North zones. The latter zone includes the country's capital city, Bogotá.

Table 4.5: Reintegrating ex combatants in Colombia by geographical location⁷

	2008 [†]	2010
<i>Atlantic Zone</i>	31%	27%
<i>Pacific Zone</i>	7%	8%
<i>Middle-North</i>	38%	33%
<i>Middle-South</i>	18%	21%
<i>Plains</i>	6%	10%
<i>N/D</i>	<1%	1%

[†] As of May 2008.

Sources: ACR (2010a), ACR database.

⁶ Systematic efforts to count illiterates have stumbled upon the fact that many of them are not being identified simply because they do not enroll in formal education. In other cases, they manage to enroll primary school while hiding the fact they could not read or write.

⁷ *Atlantic zone provinces*: Guajira, Cesar, Magdalena, Atlántico, Bolívar, Sucre, Córdoba, San Andrés Islas. *Pacific zone provinces*: Chocó, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Nariño. *Middle-North provinces*: Norte de Santander, Santander, Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda, Quindío. *Middle-South provinces*: Boyacá, Cundinamarca, Tolima, Huila. *Plains provinces*: Arauca, Casanare, Meta, Caquetá, Putumayo, Vichada, Guainía, Guaviare, Vaupés, and Amazonas.

The municipality with the largest number of residing ex combatants, since 2008 and through 2010, is Bogotá. According to official figures, ex combatants represented back in 2008 only the 0.062% of the city’s population, with a ratio of 61 of them per 100.000 inhabitants (ACR, 2008b). In contrast with every other town in the country, Bogotá hosted through the mentioned period not only the largest numbers of ex combatants, but also the most balanced proportion of ex guerrillas and ex paramilitaries. Such unique conditions made it the best fit for our research purposes, and the chosen place for our fieldwork.⁸ Further elaboration on shortcomings and opportunities derived from choosing Bogotá’s ex combatants as our sample population will be made in the coming chapter. Meanwhile, next section discusses how much ex combatant population in Bogotá differs from that in the country as a whole.

4.3.2 Ex combatants in Bogotá

At the time of our fieldwork, there were no reliable figures on how many ex combatants lived in Bogotá. ACR and press speculations put the numbers at around 4,000, although a high-rank spokesperson from Bogotá Mayor’s Office suggested in 2009 they could even surpass the 10,000 people.⁹ Only later efforts by the ACR, and the Mayor’s Office’s complementary program, have provided us with a better picture, shown in table 4.6. Back in 2008, former fighters in Bogotá represented the 12 percent of reintegrating ex combatants in the country. This proportion remained the same in 2010.

Table 4.6: Demobilized ex combatants in Bogotá, 2005-2010¹⁰

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 [†]
<i>Total number of ex combatants</i>	2,474	4,327	4,569	4,115	4,734	5,354
<i>Ex combatants enrolled in the ACR reintegration program</i>	N/A	N/A	2,967	3,665 ^{††}	4,231	3,919

[†] As of June 2010.

^{††} As of November 2008.

Sources: PAPDRB (2009), Bogotá Mayor’s Office database, ACR database.

Reversing the ratio found in the overall national population, ex paramilitaries constituted the minority group among combatants in Bogotá, representing about one-third of the population. The ex guerrillas/ex paramilitaries ratio represents the single most important difference between Colombia and Bogotá populations of former fighters. Deserter guerrillas, usually

⁸ Finding a good number of ex guerrillas in other parts of the country willing to participate in discussion exercises with other ex combatants proved to be too difficult on the ground.

⁹ Sub-secretary of Security Andrés Restrepo, during an intervention before Bogotá’s Town Council, June 18th, 2009.

¹⁰ Numbers include ex combatants still under the Ministry of Defense custody, and teens in juvenile treatment centers. They do not include an undetermined number of non-reintegrating combatants who settled in the city without reporting to ACR, nor around 1,500 former fighters who demobilized between 2002 and 2006 and were certified as officially reintegrated before ACR came into existence. About this latter population, see Acosta et al. (2007).

hiding from their comrades in arms, tended in largest proportions to choose big cities, in particular Bogotá, as optimal places for an anonymous residency. Ex paramilitaries, on the other hand, did not perceive such a security dilemma, and tended to stay close to small towns and the countryside previously under their control. Observing table 4.7, we may note that ex Farc members amounted to more than half of all reintegrating ex combatants in Bogotá by late 2008, and about eighty-three percent of all ex guerrillas.

Table 4.7: Demobilized ex combatants in Bogotá by armed group, 2008-2010[†]

	2008 ^{††}		2009		2010 ^{†††}	
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Perc.</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Perc.</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Perc.</i>
<i>AUC</i>	1,329	36.26%	1,445	34.15%	1,261	32.17%
<i>FARC</i>	1,930	52.66%	2,341	55.32%	2,230	56.90%
<i>ELN</i>	307	8.37%	315	7.44%	307	7.83%
<i>ERG</i>	16	0.43%	16	0.47%	13	0.33%
<i>ERP</i>	35	0.95%	35	0.83%	29	0.74%
<i>EPL</i>	19	0.51%	19	0.45%	21	0.53%
N/D	29	0.79%	60	1.42%	58	1.48%
TOTAL	3,665	100.00%	4,231	100.00%	3,919	100.00%

[†] Figures based on ACR reintegration program participants.

^{††} As of November 2008.

^{†††} As of June 2010.

Sources: ACR database.

On gender, we do not count on a detailed report for the time period of interest. However, the Bogotá Mayor's Office estimated back in 2009 a proportion of 86 percent of men, and 16 percent of women, based on ACR figures (PAPDRB, 2009). Thus, we may reasonably assume a similarity here between Colombia and Bogotá populations.

We do not have reliable data on education levels back in 2008, but data on 2009-2010 provides us with a general idea. For the Bogotá population, we have an account of those illiterates attending pre-school sessions, which amounted to almost 13 percent of all ex combatant students in 2009.¹¹ Both in 2009 and 2010, the proportions of those attending secondary school -6 to 11 years of education-, and superior education –university, technical, technological- in Bogotá tended to be lower than those of the national population. Comparatively, we may conclude that population in Bogotá tended to have larger proportions of people with lower levels of formal education, which may be in turn a reflection of the larger proportion of ex guerrillas.¹²

¹¹ Ex combatants in large cities may experience greater pressure to demonstrate formal qualifications, and illiterates may become more visible to ACR education services.

¹² Ex guerrillas tend to be lowly educated farmers, with relatively little previous contact with urban areas.

Table 4.8: Demobilized ex combatants in Bogotá by education level, 2009-2010[†]

	2009	2010 ^{††}
<i>No education (illiterates)</i>	12.98%	9.72%
<i>Primary</i>	33.97%	30.43%
<i>Secondary</i>	50.60%	58.24%
<i>Superior</i>	2.43%	1.59%

[†] Based on ACR reintegration program participants.

^{††} As of June 2010.

Source: ACR database.

Finally, on age, we count on reasonably reliable data for the period 2008-2010, displayed on table 4.9. Proportions for 2010 match very closely those of the Colombian population cited above. Unfortunately, we do not count on comparable figures for the year 2008. We may reasonably assume that differences in terms of age between Colombia and Bogotá population should have not been dramatically high before 2010.

Table 4.9: Demobilized ex combatants in Bogotá by age rank, 2008-2010[†]

	2008	2009	2010 ^{††}
<i>18-25 years old</i>	18.78%	19.28%	20.31%
<i>26-50 years old</i>	73.07%	69.36%	68.89%
<i>51+ years old</i>	3.86%	3.33%	3.42%
<i>N/D</i>	4.27%	8.01%	7.37%

[†] 2009 and 2010 proportions correspond to participants of the ACR reintegration program.

^{††} As of June 2010.

Source: ACR database.

In general terms, we see that ex combatants in Bogotá mainly differ from the national population in the ratio between ex guerrillas and ex paramilitaries. But, how important are differences between these two factions? The next section explores in a qualitative fashion those aspects in which the faction cleavage seems to matter, and those where it apparently becomes less relevant.

4.4 A qualitative approximation to the ex combatants' world

Ex combatants are subjected to contradictory forces that either entrench divisions and cleavages within, or pull them together as a relatively homogeneous population within Colombian society. Old adversarial identities seem to persist years after demobilization as a result of their own psychological dispositions, and even legal treatment received after demobilization from Colombian judiciary institutions. In spite of this, their sense of common grievance, resulting from their deprived economic and social status as ex fighters, prompts them to put aside their former enmities, and embrace an integrative discourse that reaffirms an emerging super-ordinal identity across war-related cleavages.

Two sources of differentiation act upon ex guerrillas and ex paramilitaries: their past war-life trajectories, and their different status as reintegrating subjects. First, in their previous time as members of armed groups, combatants develop contrasting identities that are reflected upon divergent political discourses and behavior (Bolívar, 2005; Gutiérrez, 2008). It is reasonable to expect traces of their former identity roles to subsist even some years after demobilizations took place, although a systematic test for this assumption is still required. The second source of differentiation refers to a series of legal consequences coming from the fact that ex guerrillas deserted from still active groups,¹³ while ex paramilitaries were ordered by their former commanders to demobilize, following a specific legal framework agreed with the Colombian government. Since legal benefits are different for both factions, their perceptions and expectations on their reintegration process also tend to differ.

But how do these two conditions exactly make factions differ in civil life? The effect of different war-life trajectories seems evident for peace-building practitioners, reintegration professionals, and policy-makers who deal with Colombian ex combatants on a regular basis. According to an International Organization for Migrations officer based in Bogotá, interviewed for the purposes of this research, “many paramilitaries’ former militancy was marked by an economic interest,” while the guerrilla groups did not provide money for their members, and generally did not pursue self-enrichment.¹⁴ He elaborates by saying that “ex guerrillas are former farmers who tend to be skeptical of urban vices, and are accustomed to the sacrifices of work and an austere life”. In contrast, ex paramilitaries came mainly from urban peripheries, where they would have acquired more easily vices such as use of drugs and prostitutes. In 2009, the Bogotá Mayor’s office stated that “there is a greater tendency of participation in crimes and infractions on the part of ex paramilitaries” (PAPDRB, 2009, 25). Following a similar line of argumentation, one ACR reintegration professional interviewed in Bogotá considered it easier to work with deserting ex guerrillas “because really they want to change their lives”, given that demobilization was a result of a personal decision. In words of a judicial prosecutor also interviewed, “ex guerrillas tend to be more docile”. Additionally, past experiences seem also to have left imprints in the ex combatants’ ideological stances. In particular, ex guerrillas and ex paramilitaries tend to hold opposing views, attitudes and emotions regarding the left-right political spectrum. These traits persist even years after leaving their former groups (Ugarriza and Craig, forthcoming).

Also, the type of demobilization has some serious consequences on an ex combatant’s life as a civilian. In general terms, the Colombian authorities treat all ex combatants as a special population, subjected to a State-administered assistance program. Among the many reintegration challenges this population confronts, one that generates the greatest concern to them is the legal uncertainty. Former fighters from different factions are treated under different legal frameworks after demobilizations. By 2011, ex guerrillas were considered by the law as political rebels, and legal processes against them are ceased upon voluntary demobilization, unless crimes against humanity were imputed –which was rarely the case for

¹³ Except for members from the Ejército Revolucionario Guevarista, and Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo, whose remaining structures demobilized completely in the 2000s.

¹⁴ The IOM accompanied the AUC demobilization process, and conducted an extensive survey among ex combatants, through which thousands of detailed bios and profiles were collected.

the rank-and-file-. On the other hand, ex paramilitaries were considered by law as non-political criminals who could nonetheless apply for a substantial prison term reduction. This latest interpretation of the law created problems to the Government's promises of keeping rank-and-file ex paramilitary fighters from serving prison sentences at all.¹⁵ At the time of our research, most ex paramilitaries feared imprisonment, although this outcome did not seem imminent, nor did it occur in the following months.

Although different personal stories and legal contexts make differences among factions still relevant, many post-conflict challenges and life experiences pull former fighters together across cleavages. Having ex guerrillas and ex paramilitaries to share the same reintegration process, as it is the case in Colombia, represents a huge innovation for contemporary demobilization processes in the world. One major consequence is that, in spite of deep-rooted differences and enmities built up in their past lives, ex combatants have naturally developed a cross-cleavage post-war social identity. Assuming the label of "demobilized people", many of them expressly subdue their factional attitudes to the need to pursue common goals, such as demanding social attention to their grievances as a vulnerable sector in Colombian society. This emerging superordinal identity is characterized by a dual sense of social pride and shame, on which a vindication of their former role as political and social fighters, and a moderate repentance of their violent past, mixes up into a single discourse.

The common grievances, from which a sense of unity emerges, became evident in the discussions held by ex combatants for the purposes of this research. A total of fifteen broad topics were recurrent in twenty-eight deliberative sessions, which illustrate their major concerns at the time our experiments took place:

- *Employment*: E-combatants regard access to employment as a good reason to definitively abandon illegality, and also as a necessary means to provide for their families. They say to be willing even to renounce to any financial aid in exchange for a stable job, or opportunities to return to the countryside, either to their former properties, or farms recovered by the State from the illegal armed groups' control. Also, they ask the Government to create new companies to employ ex combatants, or set hiring incentives for existing private firms. Additionally, they propose to grant the unemployed people access to goods and properties seized from illegal groups and drug traffickers, as a job-creation strategy.
- *Education*: Participants demand from the Colombian State to guarantee the gratuity of basic primary and secondary education for the youth at large; greater efforts to provide educational services in rural areas; ampler opportunities to access superior education; and a stronger emphasis on teaching moral values, both in private and public schools. Specifically for their own reintegration process, they demand special attention to illiterates, an overall increase in the quality of the educational programs offered by the ACR, and alternatives for those willing to simultaneously work and study.

¹⁵ In 2011, the Colombian parliament passed a new law that would grant most rank-and-file ex paramilitaries a legal benefit similar to full amnesty. Before that, legal uncertainty reigned.

- *Housing*: Ex-combatants describe housing property not as a privilege, but as a basic right, an unfulfilled government's promise, a source of rooting and security, and a motivation to continue in the reintegration program. They propose to channel their reintegration financial aid into a Government-sponsored housing plan, to create a special fund aimed to provide housing aid for female heads of households, and to grant ex combatants access to parcels, materials, and training services so they can build their own houses.
- *Reconciliation*: Demobilized participants perceive widespread rejection and stigmatization from society at large, being that situation an aggravating factor to their security and unemployment problems. Instead of offering apologies or reparation to war victims, ex fighters demand differential treatment for those now committed to a life in legality, as compared to those who backslide into criminal activities. Also, they want to be labeled as ordinary citizens rather than "demobilized" people, although simultaneously they want to improve their public image, through the advertising of successful reintegration experiences.
- *Insecurity*: Ex-combatants express fears of becoming victims of "social cleansing", forced disappearance, or killing in the hands of corrupted police and military members. Additionally, they feel insecure with the high crime rates in cities. Some of them consider armed self-defense measures as legitimate, while others have bitterly accepted security risks as an inevitable consequence of their past actions. They ask the Government to enforce a more severe firearms control among civilians, and greater attention to their individual security problems.
- *Culture of illegality*: Participants denounce the presence of armed groups' recruiters around their neighborhoods and working places. Some of them utterly rule out the possibility of a return to war, due to negative experiences, disenchantment of armed struggle, or growing roots in civil life, through their family and work. They demand a more decided State intervention in problems leading some former comrades to choose again a life in illegality. Problems in mention are the Government's supposedly breach of demobilization agreements, the prolonged uncertainty on former fighters' legal status, economic grievances, and overall post-war lack of opportunities.
- *Financial aid*: Participants express frustration on their shrinking financial stipend, which is far from the more generous economic support available before 2008. According to them, current stipend is insufficient to cover their family expenses, and thus they demand the ACR to ensure that their basic personal and familiar needs are met.
- *Family support*: Participants appeal to family reasons to provide a rationale either in favor of returning to illegal activities, or on the contrary to abstain from doing so. Pressures derived from economic grievances at home are usually claimed in the former case. The need to take care of relatives, and to provide a good example to children, is advocated in the latter one. In all cases, their families are described as

their source of hope for a better future, in contrast to their uncertain present. Former fighters request greater ACR economic support for family needs, and more attention to their children, especially in terms of access to education.

- *Social and political participation*: Ex combatants consider legal reforms, community dialogue, and popular initiatives as important means to deepen Colombian democracy. With respect to the reintegration program, they vindicate more ways of participation, for which they propose a number of alternatives. Some of them are to create ex combatants' associations, and elect representatives who would defend their interests before the ACR; to set deliberative forums to discuss the reintegration process; to invite civil organizations, ombudsman' offices, and mass media to accompany more closely the ACR work; and even hold direct dialogues with the Colombian president.
- *Urban challenges*: Ex combatants face new challenges when moving to urban settings, since most of their lifetime was spent in rural areas, and even the jungle. In particular, they find shocking the relatively higher cost of living, people's indifference toward the others, a highly demanding job market, and the higher sense of insecurity on streets.
- *Business plans*: For many ex combatants, the Colombian government has failed to fulfill its promise to promote employment by supporting their business plans. They demand an expanded business-management training program, more transparent procedures related to ACR's control of ex fighters' seed capital, and ACR mentoring in the long run.
- *Health*: Participants vindicate their right to health, demanding also a better quality attention, and ACR advisory on how to comply with administrative procedures they perceive as complicated, and as barriers to access.
- *Legal uncertainty*: Ex fighters say the lack of resolution to their legal problems is an incentive to take up arms again. To counter this negative fact, they demand the Colombian judicial system to speed up individual processes, and to provide better information on their actual risks of going to jail.
- *Military operations*: Some demobilized participants perceive undue pressures and reward incentives from the Government for them to engage in military operations against active rebel groups, a situation that would make it more difficult for them to leave war behind. However, some of them see here an opportunity to raise money, while helping to put war to an end. Thus, while some former fighters reject this Government's war strategy, others believe it should actually serve as a legitimate income-generation alternative.
- *Psychological assistance*: Ex combatants believe that psychological counseling is helpful only for some participants with acute problems, and not so much for the overall reintegrating population. Hence, they complain for being forced by the ACR

to attend bi-monthly group sessions. In their opinion, the ACR should identify the mentally unfit and drug-addicts, and provide psychological and even religious assistance to them only.

All of the qualitative considerations exposed above, and the quantitative data displayed in the previous section, account for the broad conditions that make ex combatants a distinct population within Colombian society. As deliberative subjects, they do not reflect by no means the country's overall citizens, but represent an extreme case along the spectrum of those involved in a deep social and political conflict. As such, they will help us to determine where deliberative criteria stand under the worse possible conditions. Precisely, the next chapter will present details of the research design applied for that purpose.

Bibliography

ACOSTA, MAURICIO; GABRYSCH, JULIA AND GÓNGORA, MARISTELLA eds. (2007). "Experiencias de jóvenes ex-combatientes en proceso de reintegración a la vida civil en Bogotá D.C.", Fescol, Bogotá Mayor's Office, Federación Nacional de Concejos de Juventud.

ALTA CONSEJERÍA PARA LA REINTEGRACIÓN. (2007). "La estrategia de reintegración: un reto que requiere la participación de todos", electronic document prepared by ACR, October.

_____ (2008a). "Evaluación de la política. 2008, un nuevo rumbo del proceso: se consolida la reintegración", report prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Reintegration.

_____ (2008b). "Diagnóstico socio-económico de Bogotá D.C.", document prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Reintegration.

_____ (2008c). "Resultados 2008", document prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Reintegration, December.

_____ (2009). "Informe de cierre al Congreso. Septiembre 2006-diciembre 2009", report presented by the Office of the High Commissioner for Reintegration before the Colombia Parliament, December.

_____ (2010a). "Reintegración en Colombia. Hechos y datos", document prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Reintegration.

- _____ (2010b). “Informe anual de gestión. Marzo de 2009 a mayo de 2010”, report presented by the Office of the High Commissioner for Reintegration before the Colombia Parliament, June.
- BOLÍVAR, ÍNGRID. (2005). *Discursos emocionales y experiencias de la política. Las FARC y las AUC en los procesos de negociación del conflicto (1998-2005)*, Bogota, CESO, Universidad de Los Andes.
- BUXTON, JULIA. (2008). “Reintegration and Long-Term Development. Linkages and Challenges”, *Thematic Working Paper*, 5, Centre for International Cooperation and Security, University of Bradford.
- CORREDOR, CONSUELO. (1992). “Las restricciones del régimen política colombiano”, in *Los límites de la modernización*, Bogotá, CINEP, Universidad Nacional, 309-351.
- DEL CASTILLO, GRACIELA (2009). *Rebuilding War-Torn States. The Challenge of Post-Conflict Economic Reconstruction*, Oxford University Press.
- FUNDACIÓN IDEAS PARA LA PAZ. (2010). “Estadísticas sobre reinserción. Actualización: enero 31 de 2010”, available at <http://www.verdadabierta.com/archivos-para-descargar/category/10-desmovilizacin-y-desarme?download=718%3Aestadisticas-sobre-reinsercion-en-colombia-enero-2010>.
- GUTIÉRREZ, FRANCISCO. (2008). “Telling the Difference: Guerrillas and Paramilitaries in the Colombian War”, *Politics & Society*, 36, 3-34.
- INSTITUTO LUIS CARLOS GALÁN ed. (2000). *De las armas a la democracia*, Bogotá, Ministerio del Interior, Instituto Luis Carlos Galán para el Desarrollo de la Democracia.
- JARAMILLO, JAIME; MORA, LEONIDAS AND CUBIDES, FERNANDO. (1986). *Colonización, coca y guerrilla*, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional.
- JARSTAD, ANNA K. AND SISK, TIMOTHY D. eds. (2008). *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding*, Cambridge University Press.
- KINGMA, KEES. (1998). “Demobilisation and Reintegration: An Overview”, in Gebrewold, K. (ed.), *Converting Defense Resources to Human Development, Proceedings of an International Conference. Report 12*, Bonn International Center for Conversion, pp.12–20.
- KINGMA, KEES. (1999). ”Post-War Demobilization, Reintegration and Peace-Building”, paper for conference on The Contribution of Disarmament and Conversion to Conflict Prevention and its Relevance for Development Cooperation, Bonn, August 30-31.
- LAMB, GARY. (2008). “Current Approaches to Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Program Design and Implementation”, *Thematic Working Paper* 1,

DDR and Human Security: Post-Conflict Security Building and the Interests of the Poor, Centre for International Cooperation and Security, University of Bradford.

- LAUFER, ROBERT S.; GALLOPS, M.S. AND FREY-WOUTERS, ELLEN. (1984). “War Stress and Trauma: The Vietnam Veteran Experience”, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 25, 65-85.
- LEPHOPHOTH, MASHIKE. (2007). “Former combatants’ involvement in crime and crime prevention”, research report, The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, November.
- MAYNARD, KIMBERLY, A. (1997). “Rebuilding Community: Psychosocial Healing, Reintegration, and Reconciliation at the Grassroots Level”, in Krishna Kumar ed., *Rebuilding Societies After Civil War. Critical Roles for International Assistance*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- NILSSON, ANDERS. (2005). “Reintegrating ex-Combatants in post-Conflict Societies”, SIDA, Department for Cooperation and Non-Governmental Organisations and Humanitarian Assistance & Conflict Management.
- OFICINA DEL ALTO COMISIONADO PARA LA PAZ. (2006). *Proceso de paz con las autodefensas, Informe ejecutivo*, Bogotá, Presidencia de la República.
- ÖZERDEM, ALPASLAN Y PODDER, SUKANYA. (2008). “Reinsertion Assistance and the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in War to Peace Transitions”, *Thematic Working Paper 4*, Centre for International Cooperation and Security, University of Bradford.
- PALACIOS, MARCO. (2003). *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia: Colombia 1875-1994, second edition*, Bogotá, Norma.
- PROGRAMA DE ATENCIÓN AL PROCESO DE DESMOVILIZACIÓN Y REINTEGRACIÓN EN BOGOTÁ D.C. (2009). *Polifonía de voces*, Bogotá Mayor’s Office.
- STOCKHOLM INITIATIVE ON DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILISATION, AND REINTEGRATION. (2006). “Stockholm Initiative on Disarmament Demobilisation Reintegration: Final report”, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.
- SÖDERBERG-KOVACS, MIMI. (2007). “From Rebellion to Politics. The Transformation of Rebel Groups to Political Parties in Civil War Peace Processes”, Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University.
- SPECHT, IRMA. (2003). “Dealing with the Conflict-Affected Groups: Jobs for Rebels and Soldiers”, in Eugenie Date-Bah ed., *Jobs after War: A Critical Challenge in the Peace and Reconstruction Puzzle*, Geneva, ILO InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction.

UGARRIZA, JUAN E. AND CRAIG, MATT J. (forthcoming). “The Relevance of Ideology to Contemporary Armed Conflicts. A Quantitative Analysis of Former Combatants in Colombia”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

UNITED NATIONS. (2006). *The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS): Introduction to the IDDRS*, New York, United Nations.

_____. (2009). *United Nations Policy for Post-Conflict Employment Creation, Income Generation and Reintegration*, Geneva, United Nations.

USAID. (2006). “Community Focused Reintegration”, document prepared by USAID. Available at pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADF305.pdf;

VILLARRAGA, ÁLVARO. ed. (2006). *La reinserción en Colombia, experiencias, crisis humanitaria y política pública*, Bogotá, Editorial Gente Nueva.